

**U.S. Department of Justice**

*United States Attorney*

*Eastern District of Virginia*

---

*Main Street Centre  
600 E. Main Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2447*

*804/771-2186  
Fax 804/771-2316*

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Richmond, Virginia  
November 25, 2002

For Further Information Contact  
Sue Vick 804-819-5400

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Donald W. Thompson, Jr., Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richmond Field Division, announce the plea today of Robert Vernon Harrelson, age 54, of Richmond, Virginia, before the Honorable James R. Spencer, United States District Judge, to distribution of electronic communication intercepting devices.

Harrelson faces a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000.00, and full restitution when he is sentenced on February 11, 2003.

The charges involve Harrelson's illegal programming and distribution of DIRECTV access cards. DIRECTV delivers approximately 255 channels of digital entertainment and informational television programming to homes and businesses in the United States equipped with DIRECTV hardware - a mini-satellite dish, an integrated receiver/decoder and a DIRECTV access card, which is necessary to operate the decoder. Between December 2000 and September 2001, Harrelson and associates illegally programmed and distributed to others access cards with unrestricted access, without paying any fees, to all DIRECTV programming. He received approximately \$6,000 in cash, and equipment and software valued at approximately \$10,000, for the illegally programmed access cards.

The case was investigated by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregg R. Nivala.